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FM AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
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INFO RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE
RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L KINSHASA 001195

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TAGS: PGOV KDEM KPKO CG ELECTIONS

SUBJECT: BEMBA'S SECURITY FORCES FIRE WEAPONS DURING VP'S MARCH INTO KINSHASA

Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

¶1. (C) As Vice President Jean-Pierre Bemba made his way on foot from Kinshasa's airport to the city's soccer stadium for an anticipated political rally, his security forces reportedly fired their weapons into the air as jet aircraft flew overhead. The planes, dispatched by Air Force Chief of Staff John Numbi, had been on patrol over the capital to provide aerial reconnaissance during the elections period. Bemba's security forces, however, claimed they fired at the aircraft because they believed the planes were about to strafe and bomb the Vice President's procession. According to reports, several Congolese police officers were injured during the incident, although the police reportedly did not retaliate against Bemba's forces.

¶2. (C) Meanwhile, as Bemba was arriving from the airport, one of the building in the downtown section of Kinshasa (which Bemba occasionally inhabits) caught fire. The building houses Bemba's protocolary office and is heavily guarded by several of his security forces from the MLC.

¶3. (C) Comment: It is unlikely Bemba's residence was set afire by any of his political opponents, as the location is heavily guarded by his own security detail. Whether or not the fire was deliberately set, Bemba will certainly try to profit from the incident to generate sympathy -- and to raise questions about political candidates' security -- as he returns to Kinshasa from a long campaign trip. While the measured response of police forces to the shooting incident on the way from the airport is commendable, Bemba's actions will only serve to raise tensions further heading in to the weekend elections. The shooting also underscores the possibility -- however remote -- of Bemba and his private troops instigating violence in Kinshasa after elections. End comment.

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